DO School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, NOT Exclusionary Discipline Practices

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Abstract

All educators will inevitably face unwanted student behavior that they need to address. A ubiquitous response to unwanted behavior is exclusionary discipline practices, including time-out, office discipline referrals, and suspensions. However, extensive research has demonstrated that these practices are associated with negative outcomes, including increased likelihood of further unwanted behavior, decreased achievement, and racial/ethnic discipline disparities. In this chapter, we provide a preventative alternative to exclusionary practices, school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SWPBIS). SWPBIS is an evidence-based framework for implementing systems to reduce unwanted behavior and increase prosocial behavior, decreasing the need for exclusionary practices.

Keywords: suspension, school discipline, school safety, positive behavior support, school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports

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The importance of social behavior has increasingly been regarded as a critical and necessary variable related to a range of important outcomes. School success hinges not just on intellectual ability, but on social competencies such as self-regulation, positive interactions with adults, and conscientiousness. These skills, as well as social interactions and attention, affect readiness for learning and are thus critical for averting students from trajectories toward chronic problem behavior and other undesirable learning outcomes (Dishion & Snyder, in press). For example, Bennett, Brown, Boyle, Racine, and Offord (2010) found that teacher-perceived social competencies amongst kindergarten students were predictive of adult outcomes, such as education, employment, crime, substance use, and mental health. Thus, addressing student problem behavior early and often has significant social and learning outcomes for students.

Studies have found that schools with proactive and preventive approaches to addressing student behavior have lower rates of discipline referrals and drop out, more instructional time provided to all students, and thus higher rates of academic success (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2012; Eddy, Reid, & Curry, 2002). Unfortunately, many schools struggle with implementing preventative and evidence-based practices for addressing behavior concerns, and too often turn to punitive and reactionary forms of punishment, such as suspensions and expulsions, as a common response. Although suspensions may be justified for violent offenses, they are often used for non-threatening problem behaviors, such as chronic absence or minor disruptions (Newton et al., 2014). For these common behaviors, there are effective strategies that teachers and administrators can use to address the causes of problem behaviors and prevent them from occurring in the future.

The purposes of this chapter are twofold. First, we describe the over-use and ineffectiveness of exclusionary practices, such as suspensions, in schools and the detrimental impact they have on social and academic outcomes for students. Second, we provide an introduction to school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SWPBIS), a systems-level approach for establishing the social culture and individualized behavior supports needed for schools to be a safe and effective learning environments for all students. We will present the theoretical foundation of SWPBIS, the research that has documented its effectiveness for improving student outcomes over the last two decades, and how SWPBIS can be utilized as an alternative to exclusionary practices in schools.

Ineffectiveness of Exclusionary Practices

Exclusionary discipline practices can be defined as removing students from typical instruction (or social environment) for a period of time in response to unwanted student social behavior. Exclusionary practices include a range of intensities, including brief timeout from classroom instruction, cross-class ("buddy room") timeouts, sitting in the hall, reflection rooms, seclusion rooms, office discipline referral, detention, suspension, or expulsion (Lin et al., 2013). Brief timeouts, the mildest forms of exclusion, are often used in response to minor misbehavior. At the other end of the spectrum, expulsions are often used as mandated responses to a limited number of state-identified offenses, such as possession of weapons or drugs. Regardless of the type, the effective result of each of these practices is that a student is removed from instruction and interactions with teachers and peers.

Rationale for Exclusionary Practices

Exclusionary practices are often implemented for one or more of the following three reasons (Morgan, Farkas, & Wu, 2012). First, they are used as reactive strategies to decrease the

frequency of unwanted behavior. The intent is that exposure to exclusionary discipline will effectively punish the behavior (Sterling Turner & Watson, 1999). Second, they may be implemented to respond to safety concerns. For example, a student may receive an out-of-school suspension after a violent incident until the school team can build an appropriate safety plan, preferably as part of a full behavior support plan, to implement upon the student's return. Third, related to the previous reason, school personnel may use exclusion to prevent further disruption of the learning environment for other students.

Presumed Mechanisms of Exclusionary Practices

The primary behavioral principle by which exclusion is intended to work is negative punishment, or removal of reinforcement from interesting activities or interacting with teachers and peers (Ryan, Sanders, Katsiyannis, & Yell, 2007). The exclusion prevents students from accessing attention during the period of exclusion. The premise is that the undesired student behavior will cease once the attention for unwanted behavior is removed (i.e., removing fuel from the fire) or that removal from class is aversive enough that it prevents future unwanted behavior because students would prefer to remain in class with their peers than be removed.

Concerns Regarding Exclusionary Practices

Although exclusionary practices are ubiquitous in schools (Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Zabel, 1986), there are serious concerns regarding their use that are worth considering. These issues are especially troubling regarding out-of-school suspensions, although they also pertain to use (and especially overuse) of less severe forms of exclusionary discipline. It is important that schools collect systematic data regarding the use and length of exclusionary discipline events—both for individual students and the school population as a whole—to identify and correct these

challenges, as well as minimize their use in general. These challenges are described in the following sections.

Reinforcement of unwanted behavior. In keeping with the principle of negative punishment, effective use of exclusion requires that the immediate environment be reinforcing for the student (Sterling Turner & Watson, 1999). If the student does not enjoy the activity or interactions with peers or the teacher, exclusion is unlikely to reduce unwanted behavior and may serve to reinforce it (Maag, 2001). For example, if a student finds a particular activity aversive, she or he may use unwanted behavior to avoid or escape it. In this way, exclusionary practices can backfire, resulting in *more* unwanted behavior. If the immediate staff member excludes the student from instruction (e.g., timeout, office discipline referral), the student's unwanted behavior is negatively reinforced, meaning that the student is more likely to use unwanted behavior in the future. As such, school personnel who regularly use systems for exclusion need to build systems to make the classroom and general school environment more positive and reinforcing for students (Ryan et al., 2007).

Iatrogenic effects on academic skills. Another drawback of exclusionary practices is that they remove students from the instructional environment, which may decrease unwanted behavior but prevent access to academic instruction (McIntosh & Goodman, in press; U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, 2014). As a result, students who are regularly exposed to exclusionary discipline receive restricted opportunities to build academic skills. For example, a recent study showed that use of a cross-class time-out intervention significantly reduced teacher ratings of problem behavior but also reduced academic achievement as well (Benner, Nelson, Sanders, & Ralston, 2012). Over time, as students fall further behind their peers academically, academic instruction becomes more aversive, triggering more unwanted behavior to escape

instruction through exclusion. This set of interactions creates an ongoing coercive cycle, in which students and teachers are continually reinforced for using unwanted behavior and exclusionary discipline, respectively (Dishion & Snyder, in press; McIntosh, Horner, Chard, Dickey, & Braun, 2008).

Accordingly, it is recommended for school personnel to conduct functional behavior assessments when students are excluded repeatedly (Sterling Turner & Watson, 1999). Such information can be used to build a support plan to disrupt these cycles and reduce, rather than reinforce, unwanted behavior.

Association with poor long term outcomes. In addition to reinforcing unwanted behavior and decreasing academic achievement, there are many documented distal negative effects of exclusionary discipline. Although it is difficult to prove causation, there is ample research evidence showing the harmful effects of exclusion, particularly out-of-school suspensions, on outcomes such as grade retention, dropout, and adult incarceration (American Academy of Pediatrics Council on School Health, 2013; Fabelo et al., 2011; Noltemeyer, Ward, & Mcloughlin, 2015). For example, a single out-of-school suspension in ninth grade is associated with a 50% increase in dropping out and a 19% decrease in enrollment in postsecondary education (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2015). Even when controlling for school and individual risk factors (e.g., antisocial behavior, deviant peer group membership), receipt of out-of-school suspensions is a significant predictor of future antisocial behavior (Hemphill, Toumbourou, Herrenkohl, McMorris, & Catalano, 2006; Lee, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011). There is also evidence that the severity of the exclusionary practice is related to severity of long-term outcomes. For example, out-of-school suspension is more strongly related more to negative outcomes than in-school suspension (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). Unfortunately, these effects are

not seen only for students receiving the exclusion; schools with high rates of out-of-school suspension have lower school-wide achievement and lower perceptions of school safety by the student body as a whole (American Psychological Association, 2008).

Overuse of exclusion for non-violent offenses. Because of the strong associations between exclusionary practices and negative outcomes, it seems clear that they should be limited to severe incidents, violent offenses in particular. However, there is evidence that exclusion is used for a range of less severe student behaviors. A recent study (Losen, Martinez, & Okelola, 2014) found that 34% of out-of-school suspensions were issued for non-violent behaviors, such as disruption or willful defiance. Unfortunately, as with students, exclusion can be reinforcing for school personnel as well. The option to remove a student from class for the rest of the period or school for multiple days can be powerfully reinforcing.

To place the use of out-of-school suspension into perspective, a longitudinal study (Schollenberger, 2015) found that 1 in 3 students have been suspended at one point in their K-12 schooling. If suspensions served a deterrent effect on future behavior, perhaps their use at these high rates could be justified. However, Massar, McIntosh, and Eliason (2015) recently found that among students that were suspended in August, September, or October, 72% received further discipline later in the year, indicating there was little evidence of a deterrent effect for suspensions, which is consistent with previous research (Atkins et al., 2002).

Racial disparities in use of exclusion. A final concern is that exclusionary discipline is provided disproportionately to students of color, and Black students in particular (McIntosh, Girvan, Horner, & Smolkowski, 2014). According to national data from secondary schools (Losen, Hodson, Keith, Morrison, & Belway, 2015), 7% of White students were suspended, but 11% of Hispanic/Latino students, 12% of American Indian students, and 23% of Black students

were suspended. In addition, 18% of students with disabilities were suspended. These risks are compounded—one in 5 districts in the country suspended over 50% of its Black male students with disabilities (Losen, Ee, Hodson, & Martinez, 2015). Although some might perceive that racial disparities can be explained by poverty or racial differences in rates of misbehavior, a range of studies have shown that race remains a significant predictor, even when controlling for these variables (Anyon et al., 2014; Bradshaw, Mitchell, O'Brennan, & Leaf, 2010; Lee et al., 2011; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). There is emerging research that racial disparities in exclusion persist, even though exclusion policies and procedures are supposedly "race neutral," because of bias in disciplinary decision making, particularly for more subjective behaviors (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Smolkowski, Girvan, McIntosh, Nese, & Horner, 2015).

What is Needed in Place of Regular Exclusionary Practices

Given the levels of unwanted behavior seen in schools and the harmful effects of overuse of exclusionary practices, it is important to provide educators with alternatives to removing students from the classroom. Exclusionary practices are reactive in nature—they are implemented in response to unwanted behavior, not as a means of preventing it, and they do not teach students the behaviors to use in place of unwanted behavior. When using exclusionary practices, experts recommend including more proactive, instructional approaches to complement them (Lin et al., 2013; Sterling Turner & Watson, 1999). As such, it is valuable to examine instructional practices that could reduce the need for and use of exclusionary discipline practices in schools.

School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports as an Alternative to Exclusionary Discipline

SWPBIS was initially developed in the late 1980s as a systematic approach for establishing the social culture and behavior expectations needed for schools to be safe and effective learning environments for all students. With its roots in applied behavior analysis and behavioral theory, SWPBIS emphasizes that behavior is learned through modeling and teaching, and that environmental factors influence when and how a behavior is likely to occur (Sugai & Horner, 2009). Therefore, new prosocial behaviors can be taught and reinforced while inappropriate behaviors are minimized through a systematic plan of teaching and reinforcement, with additional environmental changes to increase the likelihood of prosocial behavior. Adapted from the three-tiered public health model of interventions, SWPBIS outlines a continuum of supports from prevention to intensive intervention to provide students with the supports they need to be successful in school. SWPBIS is not a curriculum or manualized program; it is a framework designed to improve the adoption, implementation, and sustained use of evidence-based practices related to behavior, classroom management, and school discipline (Sugai & Horner, 2009). These outcomes are achieved by emphasizing an integration of measureable outcomes, data-based decision making, evidence-based practices, and support systems for school and district-level implementers.

A number of resources are available describing SWPBIS and its critical features in extensive detail (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, October 2015; Sailor, Dunlap, Sugai, & Horner, 2009). While this chapter strives to provide a comprehensive examination of the use of SWPBIS for the purposes of reducing exclusionary discipline in schools, readers interested in the broader uses of SWPBIS for improving student and school outcomes are encourage to read the following:

- Horner, R. H., & Sugai, G. (2000). School-wide behavior support: An emerging initiative. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 2,* 231-232.
- Sailor, W., Dunlap, G., Sugai, G. & Horner, R. H. (2009). *Handbook of positive behavior support*. New York: Springer.
- Sugai, G., Horner, R. H., Algozzine, R., Barrett, S., Lewis, T., Anderson, C., . . . Simonsen, B. (2010). *School-wide positive behavior support: Implementer's blueprint and self-assessment* (2nd ed.). Eugene, OR: University of Oregon.

Research Foundations

A wealth of empirical research conducted over the last 20 years has documented the positive effects of implementation of SWPBIS on student outcomes and organizational health. Specifically, SWPBIS has been associated with decreases in office discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010); and increases in academic achievement (McIntosh, Bennett, & Price, 2011), students' social and emotional competencies (Bradshaw et al., 2012), and school safety (Horner et al., 2009). In both randomized controlled trials and experimental single case studies, researchers have found that these improvements have been achieved through SWPBIS enhancing academic engagement and teacher efficacy, and reducing the use of exclusionary discipline practices (McIntosh, Ty, Horner, & Sugai, 2013).

Characteristics of SWPBIS

In additional to its grounding in behavioral theory, SWPBIS has five distinct characteristics that make it a systematic framework for implementation of effective practices. These characteristics are (1) the use of a three-tiered prevention model, (2) a focus on explicit instruction of appropriate behaviors, (3) the selection and use of evidence-based behavior supports, (4) a systems perspective driven by local capacity, and (5) the use of data for decision making.

Three-tiered prevention. The most defining characteristic of SWPBIS is the emphasis on prevention of problem behaviors before they occur. Unlike traditional school discipline practices, which are characterized by reacting to incidents, SWPBIS stresses the importance of establishing a continuum of behavior supports designed specifically to (a) teach socially appropriate behaviors to all students, (b) prevent the development of new problem behaviors, and (c) reduce the recidivism of existing problem behaviors (Walker et al., 1996). This continuum is organized within a three-tiered prevention model (see Figure 1). At Tier I, also referred to as universal supports, behavior interventions are provided to all students across all school settings. Tier I supports are implemented to clarify school-wide expectations and to demonstrate for all students what appropriate behavior "looks like." Tier II, or targeted supports, provides more intensive behavior supports for students whose behaviors are not responsive to Tier I interventions. Those students may receive efficient interventions, such as small group instruction or regular check-ins with a staff member. Finally, Tier III or individualized supports, are provided to students whose behaviors are not responsive to Tier I or Tier II interventions. These students are given highly individualized and intensive behavior supports to address significant behavior concerns. Specific supports at all three tiers and how they can be used in place of exclusionary discipline practices will be further discussed in this chapter.

Explicit instruction. Providing explicit instruction on appropriate behaviors is another defining feature of SWPBIS. It is not assumed that students come to school knowing what is expected of them, how to behave, and how to appropriately engage in class; within SWPBIS, those behaviors are first taught before they are expected. School personnel teach behaviors that lead to increases in social and academic success, such as how to ask for assistance from a

teacher, how to behave safely in the hallways, and how to be respectful of others in the classroom.

Evidence-based behavior supports. Although no single intervention or technique is endorsed as the fix-all strategy within SWPBIS, priority is given to the selection and use of behavior supports that have empirical evidence of their effectiveness for improving outcomes for students. Not only it is advised that schools and districts select evidence-based practices, but it is vital that those practices are examined for their social and contextual relevance within the culture of the school and grade levels in which they will be used.

Systems perspective. To maximize the likelihood that SWPBIS is implemented fully and with supports to keep the practices sustained through challenges often experienced by schools, district and states are encouraged to take a systems perspective towards implementation. A systems perspective emphasizes the establishment of local training and coaching expertise, agreements and commitments among key stakeholders, high levels of implementation readiness and fidelity, and continuous implementation and outcome evaluation (Sugai et al., 2010).

Data for decision making. The continuous collection and analysis of data is necessary for determining the extent to which behavior supports are being implemented as intended and whether those practices are improving student outcomes (Sugai & Horner, 2009). The collected data serve to improve the behavior supports available to students and are thus analyzed frequently to assess their effectiveness and feasibility.

Using SWPBIS in Place of Exclusionary Practices

With its emphasis on preventive strategies, such as teaching, modeling, and reinforcing appropriate behaviors rather than waiting for misbehavior to occur before responding, SWPBIS provides multiple effective strategies at all three tiers of the triangle that can be used in place of

exclusionary discipline practices. In this section, we outline feasible strategies that may be used at each tier of the SWPBIS framework to prevent as well as address inappropriate behaviors without overreliance on exclusion.

Tier I: Teaching appropriate behavior to prevent the need for exclusion. Tier I interventions are developed around the needs of the whole school, delivered to the whole school, and serve to foster a positive social culture for all members of the learning community, including students, staff members, and families (Colvin, Kame'enui, & Sugai, 1993; George, Kincaid, & Pollard-Sage, 2009). Tier I interventions are preventive in nature; if they are implemented well, the majority of students will be successful (Fairbanks, Sugai, Guardino, & Lathrop, 2007). They are important foundations for (a) providing teachers with the skills to address minor misbehavior within the classroom, (b) supporting the majority of students, (c) preventing the development of chronic problem behavior that could result in exclusionary discipline, and (d) identifying and providing more specialized behavior supports for students with high-intensity problem behaviors (Sugai & Horner, 2009; Sugai et al., 2000).

Tier I Practices. Before Tier I interventions can be implemented, appropriate and inappropriate student behaviors need to be clearly defined. The goal of defining behaviors is two-fold: (1) to clarify for students and adults what acceptable and unacceptable behaviors look like, and (2) to reduce inconsistency and subjectivity amongst teachers when identifying a behavior as unacceptable. Consistency is key—without it, what one teacher considers disrespectful may not be considered disrespectful by another teacher. Differences in personal definitions can send mixed messages to students, and can often result in disproportionate discipline being delivered to different students for the same behavior (Skiba et al., 2002). For

that reason, behaviors must be operationally defined so that referrals to the office are appropriate, and that the behavior matches the consequence to be delivered (George et al., 2009).

Once appropriate behaviors have been clearly defined, it is still necessary to teach them. It is not enough for school-wide behavior expectations to be posted in the classroom or in a hallway; students need to receive instruction on these behaviors, as they are the prerequisite skills necessary for success in school. Just like learning a new academic skill, students benefit from repetition of teaching behavior routines and expectations, and therefore it is more effective to teach the expectations several times throughout the school year. A common Tier I support for providing behavior instruction is what some schools refer to as the "Rules Rodeo." This routine is a process for taking groups of students around campus and explicitly demonstrating what appropriate behavior looks like in different locations, such as the gym, cafeteria, bathroom, and hallway. Staff at each of these locations lead students through teaching and modeling the expectations. Teachers also conduct direct teaching on what those school-wide expectations look like in their classroom.

Teaching of behavior expectations is not just important for student success, it is a vital part of teacher development. Ongoing staff training is essential for building fluency in implementing Tier I components. The more that staff members practice and are reminded of the Tier I procedures, the more likely the components will be delivered (George et al., 2009). Additionally, administrators depend on teachers to utilize effective classroom management strategies to prevent problem behaviors from occurring and to use appropriate practices to intervene when they do. Teacher training on how to most effectively address minor problem behaviors in the classroom allows teachers to establish their role as the classroom leader, while

reducing the amount of instructional time students would miss if minor problem behaviors were being addressed outside of the classroom.

Reinforcing appropriate behaviors with behavior-specific praise, possibly supplemented with tangible reinforcement, is one of the best strategies for increasing the likelihood that the behavior will continue (Akin-Little, Eckert, Lovett, & Little, 2004; Lepper, Henderlong, & Gingras, 1999). As such, developing a school-wide reinforcement system to provide students access to positive feedback about their behavior is a critical component of Tier I interventions in that it focuses student and staff attention on appropriate behaviors, supports a positive school climate, and highlights the value of appropriate behaviors within the school culture (Florida's Positive Behavior Support Project, 2004; George et al., 2009). For reinforcement to be accessible to all students, the criteria for earning it must be clearly defined for students. Additionally, reinforcement of appropriate behaviors needs to be provided frequently, unexpectedly, and across multiple settings for their effectiveness to be optimized.

Developing and implementing an effective system for responding to problem behaviors is another necessary component of Tier I supports. School SWPBIS teams are encouraged to clearly outline the steps of the school's discipline process in a visual format so that it may be used in teaching the rest of the staff, training new staff, and dissemination to students and families and posted in classrooms for reference (George et al., 2009). A hierarchy of consequences, including teaching strategies as well as mild corrections, is then developed to assist teachers and administrators with choosing the appropriate response when problem behaviors arise. This process should also be communicated to students and families so that everyone is aware of both the strategies teachers will use in the classroom to respond to

inappropriate behaviors, and the potential consequences that school personnel may use if problem behaviors continue.

One of the greatest benefits of collecting and analyzing data frequently is that it allows for teams of staff members to assess the extent to which Tier I supports are being adequately implemented and if they are having the expected effect on student behavior. With optimal implementation of Tier I supports, a small percentage of students (~1-20%) will be identified as those in need of additional intervention. Such patterns of response may be a result of learning histories that make general school-wide interventions less effective for their behavior, or perhaps limited previous exposure and practice with school-wide expectations (Horner, Sugai, Todd, & Lewis-Palmer, 2005). Regardless of the reason, these students should continue to receive Tier I supports along with their peers in addition to more intensive and individualized interventions.

Using Tier I SWPBIS to Reduce Exclusion. With a focus on prevention, the use of Tier I supports might reduce the use of exclusionary discipline by providing instruction on appropriate behaviors before students engage in the types of behaviors that could result in removal from the classroom. Tier I supports also provide instruction to staff on what types of behaviors should be managed in the classroom and strategies to address unwanted behavior without exclusion. Finally, by analyzing school-wide discipline data, tier I teams are better equipped to identify the misuse of exclusionary practices early and often and are thus more likely to recommend reteaching for staff on how best to address problem behaviors when they arise.

Tier II: Focusing on skill building. Students in need of Tier II supports receive interventions that are more intensive in terms of effort and frequency of implementation than Tier I supports, but these supports can be applied to a subset of the larger population of students by staff members who have more frequent interactions with them (Hawken, Adolphson,

MacLeod, & Schumann, 2009). Although some implementation differences exist, Tier II supports are directly connected to Tier I interventions by the content that is taught (e.g., instruction and practice in the school-wide behavior expectations). However, Tier II supports focus on building skills that students may be lacking by providing teaching and reinforcement of those skills on a daily basis. In many ways, Tier II strategies can be seen as methods to provide more access to or strengthen Tier I supports.

Tier II Practices. Numerous Tier II interventions have been empirically documented as being effective tools for improving student behavior with students from different age groups, including *Check In/Check Out* (Fairbanks et al., 2007; Hawken, Bundock, Kladis, O'Keeffe, & Barrett, 2014; Maggin, Zurheide, Pickett, & Baillie, 2015), and *Check and Connect* (Christenson, Stout, & Pohl, 2012). These programs have several core features in common. First, they teach self-management strategies such as picking up a self-management card, checking in with your own teachers, and recording your own scores. They also include contact with an adult mentor in the school. Third, they include direct skills instruction of behaviors that are aligned with the school-wide behavior expectation. Finally, they all have a family participation component, which may come in the form of daily and weekly feedback on their student's progress, and suggestions on how to encourage their child's participation (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

Student progress through Tier II interventions are monitored regularly by a team of staff members with more specialized behavior knowledge, and modifications to interventions are quickly implemented when data shows that a student is not meeting behavior goals. Adjustments might include, for example, making modifications to the frequency of daily assessments, the difficulty of set behavior goals, or the schedule and type of reinforcements delivered to students for demonstrating appropriate behaviors (Hawken et al., 2009). Additionally, adequate

implementation of Tier II supports might reveal that a student is in need of more individualized Tier III interventions.

Using Tier II SWPBIS to Reduce Exclusion. Tier II supports are necessary in a system geared towards reducing exclusionary discipline practices because they are provided to students who have been identified as regularly engaging in unwanted behaviors, but their behaviors are either lower in intensity and frequency or they are exhibiting new patterns that were not seen previously. These students, without proper supports, are more likely to have their unaddressed behaviors escalate over time, thus leading to higher rates of exclusion from the classroom and harsher discipline. Data systems help to identify these students early. For example, one common practice is to provide Tier II supports to any student who has received two or more discipline referrals within the first two months of the school year. This method of identification allows for students who may be at risk for developing chronic behavior problems to receive the supports they need early, before patterns of repeated exclusion emerge.

Tier III: Individualizing supports for students at the greatest risk. If a student's behavior is unresponsive to adequately implemented Tier I and II interventions, a shift to more individualized Tier III interventions is appropriate. These interventions tend to be more individualized to the specific conditions that are associated with the problem behavior and are thus considered function based (T. M. Scott, Anderson, Mancil, & Alter, 2009). Function-based supports refer to careful consideration of environmental factors that occasion (antecedent) and maintain (consequence, function) instances of problem behavior when developing behavior support plans (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

Tier III Practices. Key steps in the function-based support process include (1) selecting an appropriate replacement behavior, which is a behavior that is more socially acceptable than

the problem behavior, (2) determining how the replacement behavior will be taught, (3) creating routines to increase the likelihood of success with the new behavior, (4) determining appropriate consequences for replacement behaviors and problem behaviors, and (5) monitoring the behavior support plan (T. M. Scott et al., 2009). However, taking a function-based approach when developing behavior support plans takes skill and coordination. Beyond simple plans, the team requires access to individuals with behavior expertise and are knowledgeable about using data and collaborative planning (Sugai & Horner, 2009). Depending on the size of the school or district, this team may require supports from external sources, such as school psychologists and behavior specialists, to have access to the level of specialized expertise needed to implement Tier III interventions (C. Scott, 2013; T. M. Scott et al., 2009). In some cases, Tier III supports may include school-based mental health services or wraparound care, which often involve family support, medical expertise, and child welfare. In these approaches, student and family strengths, goals, and resources are emphasized as a means of addressing student behavior challenges (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

Using Tier III SWPBIS to Reduce Exclusion. As research has demonstrated, students in need of Tier III behavior supports are amongst those most likely to experience exclusionary discipline in response to their behaviors. Thus, Tier III interventions are critical for keeping these students in school and engaged in learning. Tier III support includes functional behavior assessment to assess the extent to which exclusionary practices may be reinforcing unwanted behavior and to teach students the skills needed to get their basic needs met without the need for exclusion. The individualized nature of Tier III supports also allows for professionals within the school, family, and community to collaborate on the supports that will allow the student to be most successful. Additionally, this type of teaming of supports provides stakeholders with the

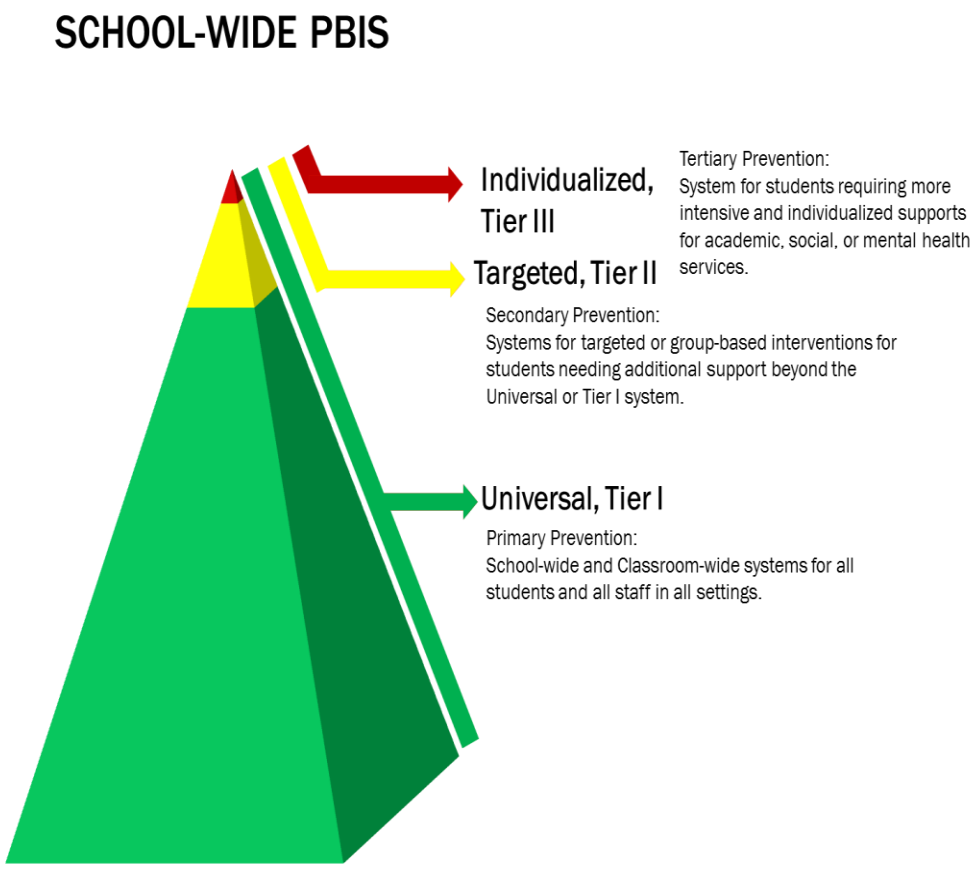
opportunity to monitor student progress more closely. Information shared amongst key stakeholders allows for regular communication on student performance, and specifically, on any intervention modification or concerning behaviors that need to be addressed. These steps are ideally taken before a student is disciplined. Tier III supports also have a central focus on individualized instruction for students, and those supports may be provided in lieu of or in conjunction with an administrator-designated consequence, reducing the likelihood that a student would be removed from the learning environment without any supplemental instruction being provided in the interim.

Conclusion

Although school discipline systems are necessary for maintaining safe school environments where students can learn and thrive, research has demonstrated that exclusionary discipline practices are not capable of ensuring school safety. Even worse, such practices lead to racial and socioeconomic disparities, academic failure, school dropout, and are direct contributors to the school-to-prison pipeline (American Academy of Pediatrics Council on School Health, 2013). Schools and districts are encouraged to weigh all options when considering exclusionary discipline as a consequence for inappropriate behavior. Such practices should be withheld for the most serious of offenses, as they are justified for behaviors that threaten the safety of members of the school community. However, even in instances where safety is a concern and a student is removed from the classroom or school, behavior instruction can teach the student why violent behavior is unacceptable and what alternative behaviors are appropriate for school. Additionally, students who are removed from class must also be provided academic support, as exclusion from class will only increase a student's likelihood of school failure.

Fortunately, as a prevention-oriented school discipline reform framework, SWPBIS has documented evidence of its effectiveness for improving student behavior and supporting a safe and healthy school climate. Many of the behavior challenges often seen by school personnel can be averted through implementing tiered instructional supports to all students, such as those described in this chapter, as well as providing teachers with the skills to address minor misbehavior within the classroom. Above all, the goal of utilizing these strategies, or any alternative to exclusionary discipline, is to provide students with the necessary life skills to solve problems on their own while allowing them to remain a member of a positive school community.

Figure 1. SWPBIS three-tiered prevention model.



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